

## Claims

What is claimed is:

1. A method of facilitating the exchange of commodities, said method comprising:

5                   utilizing a public hub in the exchange of one or more commodities, wherein a plurality of entities is associated with the exchange; and

                  performing one or more selected functions of the exchange via an automated trusted agent.

10               2. The method of claim 1, wherein the one or more selected functions of the exchange include managing one or more pricing terms associated with the exchange.

15               3. The method of claim 2, wherein the managing of one or more pricing terms includes masking at least one pricing term of the one or more pricing terms to shield the at least one pricing term from one or more entities of the plurality of entities.

                  4. The method of claim 3, wherein the one or more entities include one or more contract manufacturers.

20               5. The method of claim 3, wherein the one or more entities include one or more suppliers.

6. The method of claim 1, wherein the one or more selected functions of the exchange include managing one or more contract terms associated with the exchange.

5 7. The method of claim 1, wherein the performing enables protection of one or more contract terms associated with the exchange from one or more entities of the plurality of entities.

10 8. The method of claim 7, wherein the protection includes shielding price from one or more entities of the plurality of entities.

15 9. The method of claim 1, wherein at least one entity of said plurality of entities includes at least one contract manufacturer, and wherein the performing enables controlling allocation of commodities across the at least one contract manufacturer.

20 10. The method of claim 1, wherein multiple entities of said plurality of entities include multiple suppliers, and wherein the performing enables dividing an order for a plurality of commodities of the exchange among the multiple suppliers.

11. The method of claim 1, wherein the performing enables the managing of supply and demand of commodities.

12. The method of claim 1, wherein the automated trusted agent includes one or more tools utilized in performing the one or more selected functions.

5 13. The method of claim 12, wherein the one or more tools include at least one of a purchase order/supply order engine, linked pricing tables, and one or more supply/demand aggregation tools.

14. The method of claim 1, wherein the automated trusted agent is coupled to the public hub.

10 15. The method of claim 1, wherein the automated trusted agent is a part of the public hub.

16. The method of claim 1, wherein the exchange is based on a buy/sell model.

15 17. The method of claim 1, wherein one entity of the plurality of entities is an Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM), and wherein said utilizing the public hub comprises utilizing the public hub by the OEM to obtain a product having at least a portion of the one or more commodities.

20 18. The method of claim 17, wherein the automated trusted agent enables the OEM to retain control of one or more facets of the exchange.

19. The method of claim 18, wherein the automated trusted agent enables the OEM to retain control of at least one of sensitive information, one or more business processes, and one or more relationships associated with the exchange.

20. The method of claim 1, wherein said utilizing the public hub comprises utilizing the public hub in a networked environment.

21. The method of claim 1, wherein the plurality of entities comprises one or more contract manufacturers and one or more suppliers.

22. The method of claim 21, wherein the performing one or more selected functions of the exchange via the automated trusted agent comprises:

placing an order for the one or more commodities with at least one supplier of the one or more suppliers, the order representing a request from at least one contract manufacturer of the one or more contract manufacturers;

handling one or more invoices received from the at least one supplier; and

invoicing the at least one contract manufacturer requesting the one or more commodities.

23. The method of claim 22, wherein the plurality of entities further comprises an Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) requesting one or more products from the one or more contract manufacturers, and wherein the  
5 performing further comprises forwarding to the OEM a price differential, if any, resulting from a difference in the one or more invoices received from the at least one supplier and the invoicing of the at least one contract manufacturer.

24. A method of facilitating the exchange of commodities, said method comprising:

requesting by a first entity to obtain one or more commodities of a product, said one or more commodities to be obtained from one or more second entities via a public hub; and

using an automated trusted agent to interface between said first entity and said one or more second entities, wherein one or more aspects associated with obtaining said one or more commodities are controlled by said automated trusted agent.

25. The method of claim 24, wherein the one or more aspects include invoicing associated with the one or more commodities.

26. The method of claim 24, wherein the first entity is a contract manufacturer and the one or more second entities are one or more suppliers.

27. The method of claim 24, further comprising placing an order for the product at said first entity, by a third entity.

28. The method of claim 27, wherein said third entity is an Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM), and wherein the automated trusted agent protects for the OEM one or more facets associated with the order.

5           29. The method of claim 28, wherein the one or more facets include one or more contract terms.

30. The method of claim 29, wherein the one or more contract terms include one or more price terms.

10           31. The method of claim 28, wherein the one or more facets include at least one of sensitive information, one or more business processes, and one or more relationships associated with obtaining the one or more commodities.

32. The method of claim 24, wherein the automated trusted agent is a part of the public hub.

15           33. The method of claim 24, wherein the automated trusted agent is coupled to the public hub.

34. A system of facilitating the exchange of commodities, said system comprising:

means for utilizing a public hub in the exchange of one or more commodities, wherein a plurality of entities is associated with the exchange; and

means for performing one or more selected functions of the exchange via an automated trusted agent.

35. The system of claim 34, wherein the one or more selected functions of the exchange include managing one or more pricing terms associated with the exchange.

36. The system of claim 35, wherein the managing of one or more pricing terms includes masking at least one pricing term of the one or more pricing terms to shield the at least one pricing term from one or more entities of the plurality of entities.

37. The system of claim 36, wherein the one or more entities include one or more contract manufacturers.

38. The system of claim 36, wherein the one or more entities include one or more suppliers.

39. The system of claim 34, wherein the one or more selected functions of the exchange include managing one or more contract terms associated with the exchange.

5 40. The system of claim 34, wherein the means for performing enables protection of one or more contract terms associated with the exchange from one or more entities of the plurality of entities.

10 41. The system of claim 40, wherein the protection includes shielding price from one or more entities of the plurality of entities.

15 42. The system of claim 34, wherein at least one entity of said plurality of entities includes at least one contract manufacturer, and wherein the means for performing enables controlling allocation of commodities across the at least one contract manufacturer.

20 43. The system of claim 34, wherein multiple entities of said plurality of entities include multiple suppliers, and wherein the means for performing enables dividing an order for a plurality of commodities of the exchange among the multiple suppliers.

44. The system of claim 34, wherein the means for performing enables the managing of supply and demand of commodities.

45. The system of claim 34, wherein the automated trusted agent includes one or more tools utilized in performing the one or more selected functions.

5 46. The system of claim 45, wherein the one or more tools include at least one of a purchase order/supply order engine, linked pricing tables, and one or more supply/demand aggregation tools.

47. The system of claim 34, wherein the automated trusted agent is coupled to the public hub.

10 48. The system of claim 34, wherein the automated trusted agent is a part of the public hub.

49. The system of claim 34, wherein the exchange is based on a buy/sell model.

15 50. The system of claim 34, wherein one entity of the plurality of entities is an Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM), and wherein said means for utilizing the public hub comprises means for utilizing the public hub by the OEM to obtain a product having at least a portion of the one or more commodities.

20 51. The system of claim 50, wherein the automated trusted agent enables the OEM to retain control of one or more facets of the exchange.

52. The system of claim 51, wherein the automated trusted agent enables the OEM to retain control of at least one of sensitive information, one or more business processes, and one or more relationships associated with the exchange.

53. The system of claim 34, wherein said means for utilizing the public hub comprises means for utilizing the public hub in a networked environment.

54. The system of claim 34, wherein the plurality of entities comprises one or more contract manufacturers and one or more suppliers.

55. The system of claim 54, wherein the means for performing one or more selected functions of the exchange via the automated trusted agent comprises:

means for placing an order for the one or more commodities with at least one supplier of the one or more suppliers, the order representing a request from at least one contract manufacturer of the one or more contract manufacturers;

means for handling one or more invoices received from the at least one supplier; and

means for invoicing the at least one contract manufacturer requesting the one or more commodities.

56. The system of claim 55, wherein the plurality of entities further comprises an Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) requesting one or more products from the one or more contract manufacturers, and wherein the means  
5 for performing further comprises means for forwarding to the OEM a price differential, if any, resulting from a difference in the one or more invoices received from the at least one supplier and the invoicing of the at least one contract manufacturer.

57. A system of facilitating the exchange of commodities, said system comprising:

5 a first entity to obtain one or more commodities of a product, said one or more commodities to be obtained from one or more second entities via a public hub; and

10 an automated trusted agent to interface between said first entity and said one or more second entities, wherein one or more aspects associated with obtaining said one or more commodities are controlled by said automated trusted agent.

15 58. The system of claim 57, wherein the one or more aspects include means for invoicing associated with the one or more commodities.

59. The system of claim 57, wherein the first entity is a contract manufacturer and the one or more second entities are one or more suppliers.

20 60. The system of claim 57, further comprising a third entity to place an order for the product at said first entity.

61. The system of claim 60, wherein said third entity is an Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM), and wherein the automated trusted agent protects for the OEM one or more facets associated with the order.

5           62. The system of claim 61, wherein the one or more facets include one or more contract terms.

63. The system of claim 62, wherein the one or more contract terms include one or more price terms.

10           64. The system of claim 61, wherein the one or more facets include at least one of sensitive information, one or more business processes, and one or more relationships associated with obtaining the one or more commodities.

65. The system of claim 57, wherein the automated trusted agent is a part of the public hub.

15           66. The system of claim 57, wherein the automated trusted agent is coupled to the public hub.

67. A system of facilitating the exchange of commodities, said system comprising:

5 a public hub used in the exchange of one or more commodities, wherein a plurality of entities is associated with the exchange; and

an automated trusted agent to perform one or more selected functions of the exchange.

68. A system of facilitating the exchange of commodities, said system comprising:

means for requesting by a first entity to obtain one or more commodities of a product, said one or more commodities to be obtained from one or more second entities via a public hub; and

means for using an automated trusted agent to interface between said first entity and said one or more second entities, wherein one or more aspects associated with obtaining said one or more commodities are controlled by said automated trusted agent.

69. At least one program storage device readable by a machine, tangibly embodying at least one program of instructions executable by the machine to perform a method of facilitating the exchange of commodities, said method comprising:

utilizing a public hub in the exchange of one or more commodities, wherein a plurality of entities is associated with the exchange; and

performing one or more selected functions of the exchange via an automated trusted agent.

70. The at least one program storage device of claim 69, wherein the one or more selected functions of the exchange include managing one or more pricing terms associated with the exchange.

71. The at least one program storage device of claim 70, wherein the managing of one or more pricing terms includes masking at least one pricing term of the one or more pricing terms to shield the at least one pricing term from one or more entities of the plurality of entities.

72. The at least one program storage device of claim 71, wherein the one or more entities include one or more contract manufacturers.

73. The at least one program storage device of claim 71, wherein the one or more entities include one or more suppliers.

5 74. The at least one program storage device of claim 69, wherein the one or more selected functions of the exchange include managing one or more contract terms associated with the exchange.

10 75. The at least one program storage device of claim 69, wherein the performing enables protection of one or more contract terms associated with the exchange from one or more entities of the plurality of entities.

76. The at least one program storage device of claim 75, wherein the protection includes shielding price from one or more entities of the plurality of entities.

15 77. The at least one program storage device of claim 69, wherein at least one entity of said plurality of entities includes at least one contract manufacturer, and wherein the performing enables controlling allocation of commodities across the at least one contract manufacturer.

20 78. The at least one program storage device of claim 69, wherein multiple entities of said plurality of entities include multiple suppliers, and wherein the performing enables dividing an order for a plurality of commodities of the exchange among the multiple suppliers.

79. The at least one program storage device of claim 69, wherein the performing enables the managing of supply and demand of commodities.

5 80. The at least one program storage device of claim 69, wherein the automated trusted agent includes one or more tools utilized in performing the one or more selected functions.

10 81. The at least one program storage device of claim 80, wherein the one or more tools include at least one of a purchase order/supply order engine, linked pricing tables, and one or more supply/demand aggregation tools.

82. The at least one program storage device of claim 69, wherein the automated trusted agent is coupled to the public hub.

15 83. The at least one program storage device of claim 69, wherein the automated trusted agent is a part of the public hub.

20 84. The at least one program storage device of claim 69, wherein the exchange is based on a buy/sell model.

85. The at least one program storage device of claim 69, wherein one entity of the plurality of entities is an Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM), and wherein said utilizing the public hub comprises utilizing the public hub by the OEM to obtain a product having at least a portion of the one or more commodities.

86. The at least one program storage device of claim 85, wherein the automated trusted agent enables the OEM to retain control of one or more facets of the exchange.

87. The at least one program storage device of claim 86, wherein the automated trusted agent enables the OEM to retain control of at least one of sensitive information, one or more business processes, and one or more relationships associated with the exchange.

88. The at least one program storage device of claim 69, wherein said utilizing the public hub comprises utilizing the public hub in a networked environment.

89. The at least one program storage device of claim 69, wherein the plurality of entities comprises one or more contract manufacturers and one or more suppliers.

90. The at least one program storage device of claim 89, wherein the performing one or more selected functions of the exchange via the automated trusted agent comprises:

5 placing an order for the one or more commodities with at least one supplier of the one or more suppliers, the order representing a request from at least one contract manufacturer of the one or more contract manufacturers;

10 handling one or more invoices received from the at least one supplier; and

invoicing the at least one contract manufacturer requesting the one or more commodities.

91. The at least one program storage device of claim  
90, wherein the plurality of entities further comprises an  
Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) requesting one or more  
products from the one or more contract manufacturers, and  
5 wherein the performing further comprises forwarding to the  
OEM a price differential, if any, resulting from a  
difference in the one or more invoices received from the at  
least one supplier and the invoicing of the at least one  
contract manufacturer.

92. At least one program storage device readable by a machine, tangibly embodying at least one program of instructions executable by the machine to perform a method of facilitating the exchange of commodities, said method  
5 comprising:

requesting by a first entity to obtain one or more commodities of a product, said one or more commodities to be obtained from one or more second entities via a public hub; and

10 using an automated trusted agent to interface between said first entity and said one or more second entities, wherein one or more aspects associated with obtaining said one or more commodities are controlled by said automated  
15 trusted agent.

93. The at least one program storage device of claim 92, wherein the one or more aspects include invoicing associated with the one or more commodities.

20 94. The at least one program storage device of claim 92, wherein the first entity is a contract manufacturer and the one or more second entities are one or more suppliers.

95. The at least one program storage device of claim 92, wherein said method further comprises placing an order for the product at said first entity, by a third entity.  
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96. The at least one program storage device of claim 95, wherein said third entity is an Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM), and wherein the automated trusted agent protects for the OEM one or more facets associated with the order.

97. The at least one program storage device of claim 96, wherein the one or more facets include one or more contract terms.

98. The at least one program storage device of claim 97, wherein the one or more contract terms include one or more price terms.

99. The at least one program storage device of claim 96, wherein the one or more facets include at least one of sensitive information, one or more business processes, and one or more relationships associated with obtaining the one or more commodities.

100. The at least one program storage device of claim 92, wherein the automated trusted agent is a part of the public hub.

101. The at least one program storage device of claim 92, wherein the automated trusted agent is coupled to the public hub.

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